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ACTION PM-03

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-02 AID-05 IGA-01 CMB-01

ACDA-10 SAJ-01 TRSE-00 EB-07 CIAE-02 DODE-02 L-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-15 AEC-07 NIC-01 (SSR.) W

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R 2013457 NOV 74
 FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5343
 INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
 AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
 AMEMBASSY DACCA
 AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
 AMEMBASSY LONDON
 AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
 AMEMBASSY PARIS
 AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS
 AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE
 AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
 CINCPAC

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ANKARA FOR CENTO

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MPI O. XO. IN. US. PK

SUBJECT: DEFENCE MINISTER CRITICIZES MIDLINK 74

REF: NEW DELHI 15552

SUMMARY: DEFENSE MINISTER SWARAN SINGH TOLD PARLIAMENT NOVEMBER 17 THAT THE CENTO NAVAL AND AIR EXERCISE MIDLINK 1974 WAS THE BIGGEST HELD SO FAR AND "CANNOT BUT CAUSE CONCERN TO INDIA." HE FELT THIS "REVIVAL" OF CENTO WAS INCONSISTENT WITH GREAT POWER DETENTE. IT POSED NO IMMEDIATE THREAT TO

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INDIA BUT MIGHT INCREASE TENSION IN THE REGION. ALSO, PAKISTAN MIGHT BE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE A TOUGHER LINE AND THEREBY DELAY NORMALIZATION IN THE SUBCONTINENT. INDIA, HOWEVER, WOULD CONTINUE TO SEEK IMPROVEMENT IN IND-US RELATIONS. END SUMMARY

1. DEFENCE MINISTER SWARAN SINGH MADE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT IN THE LOK SABHA (INDIAN LOWER HOUSE) ON THE AFTERNOON OF NOVEMBER 19. THE MINISTER WAS SPEAKING TO A "CALL ATTENTION NOTICE REGARDING THE REPORTED PLAN OF NATO FORCES TO HAVE NAVAL EXERCISES IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE SERIOUS THREAT ARISING OUT OF THAT." SPONSORS OF THE MOTION INCLUDED CPI, CPM, JANA SANGH, AND CONGRESS MPS.
2. "WE HAVE INFORMATION THAT THE NAVAL AND AIR FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES, U.K., IRAN, PAKISTAN AND TURKEY WOULD TAKE PART IN A COMBINED NAVAL AND AIR EXERCISE IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE INDIAN OCEAN FROM NOVEMBER 19 TO NOVEMBER 30. THE EXERCISE IS BEING HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF CENTO AND IS CODE-NAMED "MIDLINK 1974." PAKISTAN IS HOSTING THE EXERCISE. THREE OF THE PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES- UNITED STATES, U.K. AND TURKEY, ARE ALSO MEMBERS OF THE NATO ALLIANCE. SUCH EXERCISES HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED BY CENTO IN THE PAST BUT THE EXERCISE PLANNED THIS YEAR IS THE BIGGEST HELD SO FAR BY THIS ALLIANCE. THESE DEVELOPMENTS CANNOT BUT CAUSE CONCERN TO US. THE POSSIBILITY INEVITABLY INCREASES OF GREAT BIG-POWER RIVALRY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA. INDIA WOULD ONLY BE ECHOING THE FEARS OF AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE LITTORAL COUNTRIES OF THE INDIAN OCEAN IN THIS REGARD.
3. "WE HAVE CONSISTENTLY HELD THE VIEW THAT ANY LARGE SCALE PRESENCE OF THE NAVIES OF SOME COUNTRIES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN IS BOUND TO ATTRACT THE NAVIES OF OTHERS. MOREOVER, SUCH EXERCISES TEND TO REINFORCE OUTDATED MILITARY GROUPINGS AND ACCENTUATE TENSION IN THE REGION. ONLY THE OTHER DAY I EXPRESSED PUBLICLY INDIA'S STRONG OPPOSITION TO THESE NAVAL EXERCISES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN.
4. "INDIA HAS CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED EFFORTS FOR MAINTAINING THE INDIAN OCEAN AS A ZONE OF PEACE. FREE FROM GREAT POWER RIVALRY AND MILITARY ESCALATION. WE HAVE CO-ORDINATED OUR EFFORTS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION TO MOBILIZE INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF THESE OBJECTIVES. WHILST EXPRESSING DEEP CONCERN OVER THESE DEVELOPMENTS IN

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OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD I WOULD LIKE TO REITERATE AND EMPHASISE OUR RESOLVE TO CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE GREATER INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING FOR REDUCING TENSION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN."

5. GREAT POWER PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS, SWARAN SINGH REPEATED THE GOI OPPOSITION TO ACTIVITIES WHICH LED TO GREAT POWER RIVALRY AND HEIGHTENED TENSION IN THE REGION. HE DREW A DISTINCTION BETWEEN BASES, SUCH AS DIEGO GARCIA, AND NAVAL SHIP PRESENCE. THE SOVIET UNION HAD A LEGITIMATE INTEREST IN TRANSIT AND HAD TOLD INDIA THAT IT WOULD INCREASE ITS PRESENCE AS OTHERS DID. THE SOVIETS DENIED THEY HAD BASES, AS DID THE LITTORAL COUNTRIES WHERE THE BASES WERE ALLEGEDLY LOCATED. INDIA HAD GOOD RELATIONS WITH THESE THREE STATES AND INDIAN INFORMATION SUPPORTED THE DENIALS. (THE LATTER IN RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FROM PRO-MO-COW COMMUNISTS.) INDIA FOUND IT INCONSISTENT THAT IN THIS AGE OF GREAT POWER DETENTE THAT THE CENTO ALLIANCE WAS BEING REVIVED. THE EXERCISE POSED NO "IMMEDIATE THREAT" TO INDIA BUT MIGHT CREATE TENSION IN THE REGION AND EXPOSE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION TO PRESSURES. THE MINISTER SAID INDIA WOULD NOT RAISE ANY PROTEST IN THE UN BECAUSE THE CHARTER MADE PROVISION FOR DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS, AND A PROTEST WOULD SERVE NO PURPOSE. HE SAID HE WOULD PASS TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER A SUGGESTION THAT THE AMBASSADORS AT THE CENTO PARTICIPATING STATES BE CALLED IN AND A PROTEST LODGED WITH THEM.

6. INDO-US RELATIONS: COMMUNIST MEMBERS CHARGED THAT INDIAN POLICY AMOUNTED TO "APPEASEMENT" OF THE US AND WANTED TO KNOW HOW THE MANEUVERS WOULD AFFECT IMPROVEMENT IN INDO-US RELATIONS. SWARAN SINGH REPLIED THAT IT WAS PRECISELY BECAUSE INDO-US RELATIONS WERE NOT PERFECT--AS A RESULT OF DISAGREEMENT OVER ISSUES SUCH AS THE INDIAN OCEAN--THAT INDIA WISHED TO IMPROVE THEM. INDIA WOULD CONTINUE ITS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE INDO-US RELATIONS.

7. PAKISTAN: ALTHOUGH MUCH OF THE DEBATE CENTERED ON GREAT-POWER PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN, TWO MEMBERS DID ASK ABOUT THE AFFECT ON INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS. SWARAN SINGH OBSERVED THAT PAKISTAN HAD NOT PARTICIPATED IN CENTO EXERCISES BETWEEN 1965 AND 1972 AND HAD SOUGHT TO PRESENT ITSELF AS NON-ALIGNED. INDIA HAD SAID IT WOULD SPONSOR PAKISTANI MEMBERSHIP IN THE NON-ALIGNED GROUP IF ONLY PAKISTAN WOULD LEAVE CENTO AND SEATO. NOW INDIA HAD TO TAKE NOTE OF PAKISTAN'S ACTION IN HOSTING AND PARTICIPATING IN THIS CENTO

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NAVAL EXERCISE. WHILE THE EXERCISE WOULD NOT RESULT IN ANY DIRECT INCREASE IN PAKISTANI STRENGTH, IT MIGHT MAKE PAKISTAN FEEL IT HAD GREATER SUPPORT AND THEREFORE MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH IN BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS. HOWEVER, SWARAN SINGH REJECTED THE ARGUMENT THAT INDIA SHOULD HAVE POSTPONED THE BILATERAL TALKS ON CIVIL AVIATION TO PROTEST PAKISTANI PARTICIPATION IN THE EXERCISE.

8. RELATIONS WITH THE UK: SWARAN SINGH REPORTED THAT THE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT DID NOT APPEAR TO HAVE PRODUCED ANY CHANGE IN THE UK POSITION ON DIFGO GARCIA. INDIA HAD THOUGHT IT MIGHT, BUT US PLANS WERE PROCEEDING. AND THE UK WAS "ACQUIESCING." MOYNIHAN